

Battlefield Tactics Change, So Should Training

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Today's Battlefield

Since the Coalition of the Willing's initial thrust into Iraq and the subsequent collapse of Iraq's political and military structure, ground tactics employed in the United States' military operations have diverged from what the Marine Corps has trained for in recent years. Operations have taken on what many refer to as an "asymmetrical" aspect which is a really fancy way of saying the battlefield has become messy and not the way the Marine Corps would prefer to conduct military operations. The most notable element of this "asymmetric" battlefield is smaller, lighter, more widely spread, and harder to identify pockets of resistance occurring in or near urban terrain.

With this change in operations, the need for tank units to operate purely or in great numbers has been significantly reduced. Lack of the need for large tank units has led to the utilization of tank platoons and sections working away from their parent units in the support of infantry units more often than in the past. Tank elements and infantry elements working together in smaller units than the Marine Corps normally trains for has become common on the battlefield. Instead of tank company or platoon commanders working for an infantry battalion or company commanders, there have been tank section leaders

working for infantry platoon or squad leaders. This integration at smaller levels has been key to the Marine Corps being more effective in the current combat environment.

"By far the best two supporting arms used were tanks and CAAT. Tanks and CAAT were the infantryman's best friend."¹

With this push to smaller unit action, many tankers are forced to give classes to infantry small unit leaders on the basics of incorporating tanks into their courses of action as they attach to them. These classes take place sometimes minutes before crossing the Line of Departure. Minutes before an attack is not the time to learn how to use a major attached asset. A basic understanding of tank-infantry integration needs to be understood by both small unit tank and infantry leaders. The Marine Corps needs to place more emphasis on small unit tank-infantry training in order to ensure success in current operations in Iraq and similar future operations. Potential implementation of this emphasis could be incorporating tanks into the smaller ranges included in Mojave Viper/CAX, changing infantry and tank Individual Training Standards to include more

¹ Catagnus, Jr. E. J., Edison, B. Z., Keeling, J. D., and Moon, D. A. *Lessons Learned: Infantry Squad Tactics in Military Operations in Urban Terrain During Operation Phantom Fury in Fallujah, Iraq*, 13.

integrated training, and by the utilization of assets available in training as they would be in combat.

Mojave Viper/CAX

Mojave Viper/CAX is a great environment to implement change in tactics as it would impact a large portion of the tank and infantry units in the Marine Corps. Mojave Viper/CAX is a major training evolution conducted at Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center in Twenty-Nine Palms California several times a year. The combat arms portion of the training evolution is usually focused on training an infantry battalion, under the guise of being part of a larger MAGTF. Training events available at Mojave Viper/CAX range in size from small unit events up through battalion sized events all of which can be tailored to the training needs of the infantry battalion.

Normally, the infantry battalion goes through a series of ranges and problems that require specific actions. They conduct a series of smaller unit actions, squad/platoon level actions of varying types, company actions, and finally battalion actions as part of a larger MAGTF. Units participating in Mojave Viper/CAX should arrive already proficient in these actions as this training evolution is meant for refinement and experimentation, not for learning fundamentals.

Prior to conducting any of these actions, the units conduct in-depth planning that is refined and augmented by classes given by the Tactical Training Evaluation Control Group (TTECG). Members of TTECG are referred to as "coyotes". The coyotes emphasize integrating fires to create a combined arms dilemma for the enemy in all of the infantry's ranges and problems. This integration of fires is not limited to the infantry battalions' organic assets, but includes the integration of attached and supporting assets as they are made available to the infantry units. Normally one of the attached assets the infantry battalion has is a tank company that attaches a few days prior to the commencement of company-sized problems and will remain attached through the battalion-sized problems.

The problem with Mojave Viper/CAX in its current configuration is that it does not train the current operational need of small unit integration between tanks and infantry. This problem can be solved by attaching tank units earlier in the Mojave Viper/CAX evolution and encouraging the infantry small unit leaders to incorporate tank assets into their squad/platoon evolutions. This small unit integration would give many of the infantry small unit leaders their first opportunity to incorporate tanks into their planning. It would also give many of their small unit members opportunity to work with tanks on an intimate level.

Individual Training Standards

Modification of Infantry and Tank Individual Training Standards (ITSs) to include more small unit integration is a logical step in ensuring changes in training practices in the future. ITSs are a set of standards established to ensure that unit training is conducted in such a way by a given military unit, that the individuals within that unit will have the basic proficiency in his/her job necessary to allow that unit as a whole to be able to conduct its Mission Essential Tasks (METs). ITSs are broken down by task and by rank. A generic example would be a set of ITSs under the heading of Offensive Operations which would have the ITSs associated with the heading by rank. An ITS for Lts would be, plan and conduct deliberate attack, whereas a Sgt's ITS would be, conduct dismounted observation post.

"DUTY AREA 04 - OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS

13) 1802.04.13 CONDUCT DELIBERATE ATTACK X X 12 2ndLt 6-A-59

25) 1812.04.25 CONDUCT DISMOUNTED OBSERVATION POST 12 Sgt 6-B-70"²

Generally, these ITSs are very MOS specific and structured for larger military operations. Infantry have pure infantry

² *INDIVIDUAL TRAINING STANDARDS (ITS) SYSTEM FOR TANK AND ASSAULT AMPHIBIAN VEHICLE OCCUPATIONAL FIELD (OCCFLD) 18, VOLUME 1 - M1A1 TANK, 2005, 9.*

ITSS and tanks having pure tank ITSS. The problem with the ITSS within the infantry and tank field is not what they contain, but what they do not. The ITSS are lacking individual training standards that focus more on integrated small unit actions, in which platoon, squad, and section leaders from both fields conduct joint planning and execution. With a few modifications and additions to existing ITSS, training events can be encouraged between infantry and tank units that are not already part of some larger training packages. These modifications would lead to infantry platoons taking a section of tanks with them for their squad and platoon field exercises if and when available, and tank platoons requesting infantry squads or platoons to accompany them on their training events.

Ultimately, the goal is to add more regularity to tank-infantry training at lower levels so that deployed infantry and tank units are at least familiar with one another's tactics and planning practices, without sacrificing proficiency in their own requirements.

Leadership in Action

Leaders in both the tank and infantry organizations who encourage subordinate leaders to train more realistically would have significant and positive effects on units in training, and

ultimately in combat. This need for encouragement is not an implication that subordinate unit leaders are doing anything wrong, but that often times leaders get too focused on a single envisioned goal that they do not take advantage of opportunities that present themselves. An example of a leader being too focused on a single goal is when a mechanized infantry company reinforced by a platoon of tanks planned and executed a live fire operation in training completely differently than they would in a real world mission.

The mission was an attack in open terrain against fixed enemy positions. These enemy positions lacked any significant armor defeating assets and had extremely limited mobility. This operation called for one course of action, yet the company commander followed another course of action so he could maximize his infantry pure training. He even stated the to the tank platoon commander, that had this been a "real world mission", he would have executed the proper course of action. He would later state that he regretted his decision since it was the only opportunity during his company command to utilize an attached tank unit.

The above example is one of many that could be told by any tank officer and most if not all infantry officers, which leads to an important saying in regards to military training, "Train the way you fight, because you will fight the way you train."

Marine leaders have to think in terms of fighting a "real world mission" in training by using assets they have attached or supporting the way they would if they were going into an actual battle where the lives of their Marines were at stake. Failure of leadership to stress this mindset can lead to subordinates getting a false picture of how they should use assets available, as well as the corrective training to remedy this false picture being conducted when it should not, under fire.

Conclusion

The above examples are just that, examples. The Marine Corps does not need a restructuring of its entire training system or emphasis, but there are ways of modifying it to bring about the proficiencies we need in our smaller unit leaders concerning tank-infantry integration. Many Marines might argue that changing the Marine Corps' training system and emphasis may take away from its traditional capabilities, and they may be right, but the demand for the Marine Corps to operate in conditions not conducive to its preferred fighting methods is too urgent to ignore.

The Marine Corps' emphasis on small unit tank-infantry training is insufficient, and changes need to be implemented as soon as possible in order to ensure its continuing success in

current operations in Iraq and similar future operations.
Marines must have the necessary tools to fight in an
"asymmetrical" battlefield prior to them being in it.

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